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Gary, Elbert Henry

Address ... at banquet of American Iron and Steel...

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ADDRESS BY

ELBERT H. GARY, President

AT BANQUET OF

AMERICAN IRON AND STEEL INSTITUTE

HOTEL COMMODORE, NEW YORK

NOVEMBER 18, 1921

MARSHAL FOCH, Guest of Honor

ADDRESS BY

ELBERT H. GARY, President

AT BANQUET OF

AMERICAN IRON AND STEEL INSTITUTE

HOTEL COMMODORE, NEW YORK CITY

NOVEMBER 18, 1921

Marshal Foch, Ladies and Gentlemen:

From the viewpoint of the Allies and their associates in the stupendous war which was precipitated in the summer of 1914, the darkest days were in the early part of April, 1918. All in all, the enemy had built up the nearest perfect fighting organization that had ever been established. In strength, system, equipment, fortifications, experience, training and morale, it had reached great proportions and the successes it had achieved created a feeling on its part that it was invincible.

About March 20, 1918, the German army on the western front began a series of terrific offensives and it was the most formidable military force the world has ever seen. Within eight days the enemy had driven the allied army in the northwest fifty miles with immense losses in men, guns, ammunition and provisions and with corresponding depression in spirit on the part of those who survived. Apparently only the assistance rendered to the English soldiers by recruits prevented immediate and complete disaster. It appeared to be impossible to stem the tide of offense.

The world looked on and wept, and prayed for deliverance. Our own soldiers by thousands upon thousands had left their

homes and were already in that vortex of destruction or on their way; and we were dismayed.

Our leaders and those of other countries were possessed with feelings of anguish, almost despair; for the fate of Great Britain, of France, of the world, of civilization itself, hung in the balance.

And the conditions which obtained in the northwest applied more or less to other parts of France, to Belgium, to Italy and to other countries.

But our cause was righteous; and an overruling Providence furnished a deliverance.

The associated defending armies were commanded by able and intelligent leaders, the soldiers were strong and brave and loyal, the countries, considered as a whole, were possessed of ample resources, but the facilities for successful warfare had not been perfectly utilized.

On April 3, 1918, at the most desperate period in the history of the war, there was a meeting at Beauvais, France, attended by Poincaire, Clemenceau, Foch, Petain, Lloyd George, Haig, Henry Wilson, Pershing and Bliss, assembled to consider what, if anything, could be done to prevent further advances by the enemy and perhaps his final success. We have credible information that orders had already been agreed upon and formulated for the almost complete withdrawal of the defensive army to be followed later by the evacuation of Paris and perhaps also the French side of the English Channel. When the conqueror of Fere-Champenoise was told of the conclusion which had been reached, with words of burning eloquence, like a thunderbolt from the sky, Foch declared in substance: "We must retreat no further, we must attack; at one point and then another and still another. In this way we will stop the offensive."

And then it flashed through the minds of his hearers that

Foch was an offensive fighter, that as a professor in military college he had taught that the "best means of defense is to attack," that at the Marne battle line about September 1, 1914, he had telegraphed his superior officer Marshal Joffre: "My center gives way, my right recedes but the situation is excellent and I shall attack with my left," and that he had done so with almost superhuman skill and vigor, and won, and thus saved Paris from capture by the enemy, which its citizens had believed imminent.

And they appreciated the force of the argument concerning forward attacks at various places simultaneously or practically so, which necessarily involved coordination of all the military forces of the allied armies, men and supplies, and therefore that General Foch was the man to lead and direct them. Our own greatly admired and much beloved General Pershing, with clearness and emphasis, advocated the appointment of Foch as Chief Commander.

Consequently the gentlemen at Beauvais whose names have been mentioned, prepared and signed an agreement which provided that General Foch should immediately be charged by the British, French and American Governments with the coordination of the action of the allied armies on the western front, and should be given all the powers necessary for effective realization. No limit was placed upon his right to direct military operations. Italy later joined in this arrangement.

No decision of greater importance concerning the welfare of the world has ever been made by mankind than the one which placed Foch in general command and direction of the allied and associated armies. Possibly one of equal magnitude and consequence will be made at Washington in the near future.

By this action Foch became supreme. He was placed in

control of 6,500,000 soldiers, by far the largest organized army ever assembled under the direction of one man. This was thirteen, or more, times the size of Napoleon's largest army.

So soon as Foch received his appointment as Chief of the allied armies he began to coordinate all the forces and movements of the units under his command. Needless to say he was cordially and intelligently supported by the chief officers of the various armies and the men under them. It was not long before complete harmony prevailed throughout the entire field of action. This applied to the battle fronts, to the furnishing and transportation of supplies and to the welfare of the men and women who were engaged in winning the war. With perfect discipline and order, exact justice and humanitarian methods, the business of conducting a successful war of the largest magnitude ever known became methodical and systematized; and the armies soon advanced.

There followed appalling combats, both offensive and defensive at the beginning, for the Germans soon made an unexpected and rushing attack which at first was somewhat successful. But Foch was prepared for emergencies and his great organization fought with the precision and continuity of perfect machinery. Of course, great destruction of life and immense suffering resulted, but what mattered that in the opinion of the brave soldiers who felt that they were winning the war under the command of their skilful and successful leader; of one who was working in accordance with thoroughly studied and well considered plans and who understood the situation from hour to hour at all parts of the battle areas; one who would not unnecessarily sacrifice a single life; one who was devoting his strength and his entire time, with the exception of a few hours each day for necessary sleep and

one hour each day for prayer, all for the cause of freedom, liberty and justice?

The men of affairs here assembled appreciate from experience what it means to a large enterprise to have perfect coordination of forces and perfect system in management; and they know how easy and simple to control it seems to outsiders, especially those of little practical knowledge, if the business is successful and moves without internal friction. We civilians cannot adequately sense the herculean task which was assumed by Marshal Foch, but we cannot fail to remember nor banish from occasional thought the information which came to us from day to day during the long and anxious period from August, 1914 to November, 1918, detailing the onward marches of the Germans into Belgium, France, Italy, Russia, Poland and the Balkans, involving the destruction of millions of lives and billions of property. Likewise we cannot overlook nor minimize the relief which came to our minds almost immediately after Marshal Foch assumed charge of the defense and turned it into an offense. And we appreciate that under his command the war was won.

It is pleasing to remember how willingly and devotedly the stalwart, talented and experienced generals of the various countries accepted the leadership of Marshal Foch and placed themselves entirely under his direction; and it is equally agreeable to recall the attitude of the Marshal toward these generals and their armies. They believed in him and he trusted them from the beginning to the end. As one illustration, you will remember the Argonne. This was an area about twenty-seven miles long by ten or more miles wide, a large part covered by forests. It was exceedingly rough and more strongly fortified than had ever before been attempted for any similar space. For four years continuously the Germans had held this territory and it had been

considered impregnable. When it became essential, for reasons not necessary now to mention, to secure possession of the Argonne, Marshal Foch entrusted the task to General Pershing and his armies. It was a stupendous undertaking; and, in passing, it may be remarked General Pershing made good.

It would not be useful nor is there time to detail the battles which followed, one after another and at different places, the appointment of Marshal Foch. At Chateau Thierry the defense was turned into an offense and from that time until the end the Germans never could fully reestablish their lines. As previously advocated, the great commander struck at one point and then another with great skill and persistence until the morale of the Germans was lowered and the army rendered comparatively helpless. The allied coordinated military machine battering with deadly precision bewildered and overwhelmed the German army until it begged for mercy.

Again the wisdom and sagacity of Marshal Foch was influential in preventing the commission of a grave mistake. The Germans asked for an armistice. One prominent in the councils of the defending nations answered that no armistice would be granted until after the Germans had evacuated France and Belgium; and this notwithstanding at this time they were, and for several days had been, using every effort to get out of these countries without sacrifice. Marshal Foch again injected himself into the discussion and insisted in language plain and positive that the negotiations and terms of the armistice had better be turned over to the army. The suggestion was adopted and he was then placed in charge of the whole matter.

Picture, if you can, this great soldier with a few comrades in the forest of Compeigne, practically hidden from the view of his armies, in quiet conversation with the German repre-

sentatives (whose methods, manners and designs I will not characterize) concerning terms and conditions relating to the cessation of hostilities. Modest, gentlemanly, even kind in manner and tone, Marshal Foch was nevertheless strong and determined; and he was clear and convincing. On this occasion he again showed himself to be a great man. He comprehended the present and he accurately forecasted the future. With no spirit of hate nor revenge but with a feeling of duty towards them that had confided to him their interests, he demanded and obtained terms that were calculated to protect his principals. I will not say whether or not these terms have since been modified by others.

But Foch was and is even a bigger man in peace than in war. This is because he abhors the latter and loves the former. Fine, loyal soldiers are the first to enter war in defense of principle and country; they would be the last to voluntarily kill or fight for anything less. It is to be hoped that the distinguished soldiers from the different nations of the world, who are supposed to be in Washington at the present time in an advisory capacity on questions pertaining to limitation of armament, will have a potential voice and I believe they will. Those who suppose the army men generally will advocate unnecessary war or stand for unreasonably large armies or instruments of warfare will, I think, find they are mistaken.

God grant that the conference at Washington will finally bring about conditions which will establish and maintain continuously and permanently peace between all nations and that the guest of honor here this evening may have the pleasure of exerting a strong influence in this direction.

We know what our guest desires, for he has recently said: "War is the most abominable thing on earth. War is but a means and peace is an end. I have seen when in the line,

millions of young men fallen on the field of battle, and in the presence of these hecatombs could any one argue in favor of war?"

Marshal Foch was born in the upper Pyrenees. His ancestor was a soldier under Napoleon. Foch was highly educated, including the science of war. He has been a military instructor and a soldier all his life. It has been written of him that "such was his fine confidence in life that he communicated to others, not his grievances, but his secret satisfactions." He taught that God is on the side not of "the heaviest battalions" but of the men most in earnest about the ideal for which they are fighting. He was advanced in the French army from one position to another until he reached the highest. He is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, generals of all time. With other accomplishments, he is a metallurgist.

The world owes him a debt of gratitude it can never fully repay and indeed it does not desire to do so. We are all happiest in being his everlasting debtors.

This brave scholarly, thoughtful Christian soldier honors us by his presence on this occasion. After a slight diversion it will be my privilege and pleasure to present you to him.

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